

TICK

MY

BOX

A ZINE ABOUT FEMINISM,  
GENDER AND RADICAL  
LOVE

Welcome and thanks for reading "Tick my box". This is where I have a rave and say: what is this zine all about anyway?

## Feminism

I am a feminist. I first connected with values that led me to identify as feminist when I was at an all-girls school. At university I discovered the Wom\*n's room, and my politics expanded. I joined campaigns demanding an end to domestic violence, sexual abuse and eating disorders. I marched in rallies for Aboriginal sovereignty, painted banners and had unlimited free tampons. I worked at a feminist domestic violence refuge and rape crisis service while studying social work. I helped organise International Wom\*n's Day events and Reclaim the Night marches. Many of my friends were lesbian-identifying wom\*n.

Feminism offers a useful framework to analyse power dynamics and the privilege held by certain groups. A lot of positive social change has come about because of decades of work by people who identify as feminists; they have achieved numerous educational reforms, given women unprecedented levels of control over their fertility and sexuality, and changed legal practices around rape by calling rape within relationships a crime. On a personal level, feminism and wom\*n's liberation gave me the tools to express my experiences of violence and rape and told me these things were not ok.


However, not everyone benefits from the way feminism has been constructed. The autonomous organizing of wom\*n's "consciousness raising" groups in the 1970s as well as of wom\*n's collectives, including lesbian groups in current times, has excluded people, namely men (born or identifying) folk. This politics of exclusion has also denied trans\* wom\*n access to many feminist spaces because they were not "wom\*n-born wom\*n". The result has been that feminists and/or lesbians have defined for other people what it means to be a wom\*n for the purpose of excluding them from autonomous spaces. For what purpose?

## Love

When I was in my last year of university I had a lover who surprised me by saying ze not only didn't like hir period but felt mostly like a man and asked what I would think if ze had hir breasts removed. Fine, I said, I love you, not breasts. Around this time another friend of mine came back from the USA with tranny porn and stories of trans\* Pride marches and radical gender variant communities. Cool, I thought. Gender is an oppressive construct. Down with patriarchy! Down with gender oppression! That's feminist, right? Or is it?

Through being with trans\* lovers, I have seen the punishment society reserves for gender outlaws. My lovers frequently experienced harassment and threats, taunts of "what are you, a man or a wom\*n?" People followed them into the toilets, threw things at them. Their families rejected them. I have sat with my lovers, held them in my arms when their shame prevented them from looking





me in the eye, as they raged or despaired at another injustice, criticism, misunderstanding, trying to just be themselves and get by in life.

I have also seen them feel uncomfortable or unwelcome in feminist spaces. And I wondered why? When feminists claimed that feminism sought social justice through analyzing and changing unequal power dynamics between groups of people, I thought they meant social justice for ALL humans. But this was not the political practice I saw. You can't liberate one group while you oppress another. When I think of wom\*n's liberation, I think of standing with Aboriginal people, trans\*wom\*n, trans\*men, people with disabilities, immigrant and migrant communities and younger folk, older folk and striving to make everyone feel heard, safe, valued, free and accepted.

I don't believe excluding male-identifying or cisgendered males (born male) or trans\* wom\*n makes a movement stronger but rather weaker. We need allies and solidarity if we are to successfully create any lasting social change. I would rather see more people in my corner sharing my goals and vision for the future, than carve out a little space where people have an illusion of safety with those they perceive are like them. That is just another form of privilege. What is more, I certainly don't feel comfortable telling anyone what their gender is and how that should make them identify or behave. To do this is to act oppressively.

### Gender

I realized that in the many spaces I was in, feminism was not used to produce a radical analysis of gendered power and how the gender binary (male/female) hurts us all. Rather, a significant part of the community remained attached to a rigid gender bind. This allowed them to feel they could define for a larger group of people what they thought it meant to be a wom\*n based on an essentialist "wom\*n born" argument. In defining gender, they discriminated against trans\* and gender queer people. Often, they justified this discrimination by saying it contributed to the "safety" of other wom\*n. This assumes violence will be perpetrated if men are present. I know overwhelmingly violence is perpetrated by men against wom\*n. However, I don't believe "all men are rapists", and I have been raped by a wom\*n. I know many male-identifying folk who are feminist allies, and I know "wom\*n's only" spaces aren't automatically safer. To assume they are is to stereotype wom\*n as "nicer" and "safer". Gender stereotypes are problematic because they maintain a gender binary that feminism should be dismantling!!

I wanted to create this zine to document conversations being had in my kitchen, at bars, in parks and in the community about gender, particularly in light of certain movements that had grown out of wom\*n's liberation/ feminism which are attempting to come to terms with trans\* communities. I was sad to hear trans\* people were excluded from the Michigan wom\*n's festival (go Camp Trans!!) and Les Fest in Australia. I could make a long list of other events and spaces where trans\* and genderqueer people have been excluded or made to feel unsafe. However, I would like to acknowledge some progressive trans\* inclusive entities - trans\* remembrance day in Sydney, Slit magazine, Zoe Belle

Gender Centre and "Out of the Pan" on 3cr radio in Melbourne. There are probably more examples, and hopefully the list is growing...

The inspiration came for this zine when word went around that a feminist conference in Brisbane was proposing to reject applications for workshops by trans\* people. As a feminist and social change activist who identifies with the anarchist community, I opposed this decision. My definition of patriarchy and gender oppression is that everyone is oppressed by gender binaries and sexism hurts us all.

### Power

**I would like to share some words from the San Diego Indymedia website: Wom\*n fightback. <http://sandiego.indymedia.org>**

*"When we act together, we become stronger and more confident. When we fight back together, we can move mountains. The isolation and alienation of sexism and racism, of sexuality and gender oppression, of class oppression, is broken down, and we become a powerful force for change. We can lift up our voices, demand our needs be met, and act to create a more just world."*

*A vibrant, strong, independent, multinational wom\*n's movement led by wom\*n who represent the most oppressed workers, and by poor people, undocumented immigrants and Indigenous peoples, young and old, lesbian, bisexual and heterosexual, transgender and transsexual, disabled and deaf, has the power to change history. A wom\*n's movement independent of capitalist interests and big-business political parties is essential to changing the world."*

PS: I believe there is value in documenting the conversations we have about gender and feminism as individuals so that we can through sharing these conversations contribute to a larger feminist and queer culture and to feminist and queer movements for social change. Hence "tick my box" isn't just the musings of one queer white femme, but includes diverse voices of people affected by (hetero) sexism and multiple oppressions under capitalism.

I would like to thank (in no particular order): KB for support and assistance with question modification, Katie for editing and encouragement and Az and others for sending the questions out on email lists. Much respect to all my contributors (in alphabetical order): Alana, Barbara, Chanelle, Cyd, Divo, Frances, Jarrah, Lilia, Katie, Nate, Sally, Sunny, Shannon, Tracey and Vanessa.

Radical love,

Lady Betty

This is the original text of the email I sent out on lists and networks from Brisbane, to Melbourne, the UK, USA and beyond!

I want YOU to contribute to a zine being created to encourage and contribute to dialogue around the issue of trans\* and genderqueer folk and the feminist/wom\*n's liberation movement/ community/ spaces.

It will only take less than 10 minutes of your time..You can be anonymous if you wish. Alternatively, u may include photos and contact details if you wish!

This zine is being formed as a way of concretising and documenting numerous conversations happening in people's lounge-rooms, bars, workplaces, communities and other spaces. I also hope it will be done in time to be distributed at the Brisbane "International Feminist Conference" in September.

I will not be censoring or editing people's responses, unless asked specifically to do so. The style will be mostly text, with photos if they are submitted and any suggestions for other images gratefully accepted.

\*\*\*Please forward on to anyone else who identifies as trans\* or genderqueer who may be interested \*\*\*\*\* And of course participants will get a copy of the zine..and love..

If you have any questions, clarifications or comments, please forward them to this email address [genderqueerzine@gmail.com](mailto:genderqueerzine@gmail.com) or phone (my old phone number) after hours. Deadline for submissions is 31 August 2008 (and then some...)

If no further queries, then please read on...

#### THE QUESTIONS

1. Who are you?
2. How would you describe your gender?
3. What's your pronoun?
4. Which community do you identify with?
5. Are you a feminist?
6. Why/not?
7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?
8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?
9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?
10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\*people

1. Who are you? Cyd      2. How would you describe your gender? Transfag boy
3. What's your pronoun? he/his/him      4. Which community do you identify with? Trans and sex worker communities
5. Are you a feminist?

I would say that I am a feminist in that feminist ideology is very important in my life and forefront in the narratives of my communities. But at the same time I don't feel a lot of connection to the title "feminist"

6. Why/not?

I didn't have female dominated/empowered communities or friendships with women growing up, or really until I was about 21. By the time that that changed in my life, it was at a time during which both me and the women in my world were sex workers and at odds with some components of feminist ideology.

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?

I've done activism around things that I would consider the feminist causes, i.e. sex work, sex positive movement, sexual assault response and safer spaces, and queer and trans advocacy and collectivizing. On the other I've also encountered groups such as Project Respect an Australian feminist save a ho group who tries to tell me and my friends that we are disempowered victims and which have helped the government institute fucked up immigration policies to "prevent trafficking". I've taken classes at a feminist circus that said the reason that it excluded trans women was to "save women from having to see triggering male bodies" and which wouldn't have let me partake if I'd been out as trans. And I've read books by feminist writers such as Andrea Dworkin who say that my personal BDSM sexuality is harmful to womankind.

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

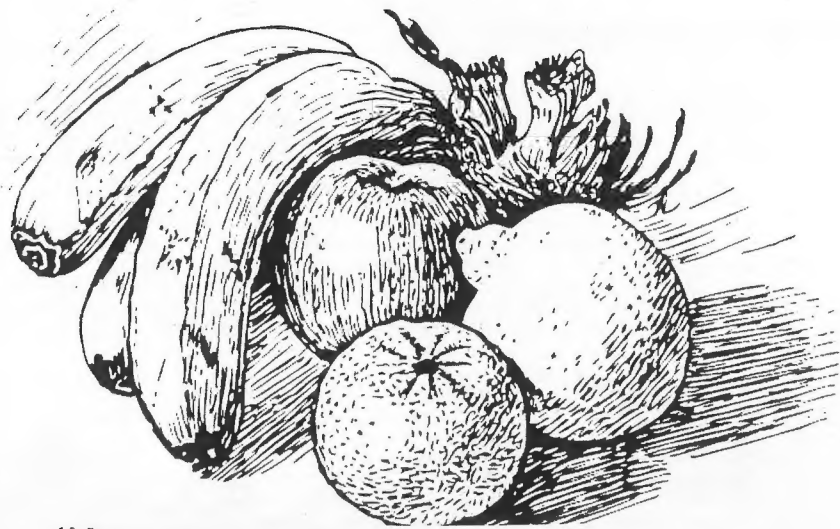
I have some friends who are hella deep lez, and are trying to make sure people don't throw out the baby with the bathwater, so to speak, in the queer community in terms of not rejecting feminist principles.

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

If NOW and other feminist organizations had a better track record in regards to supporting trans people and sex workers, I would feel a closer affinity to them and want to become more involved in large feminist projects and organizing.

bitterandthensome@  
hotmail.com





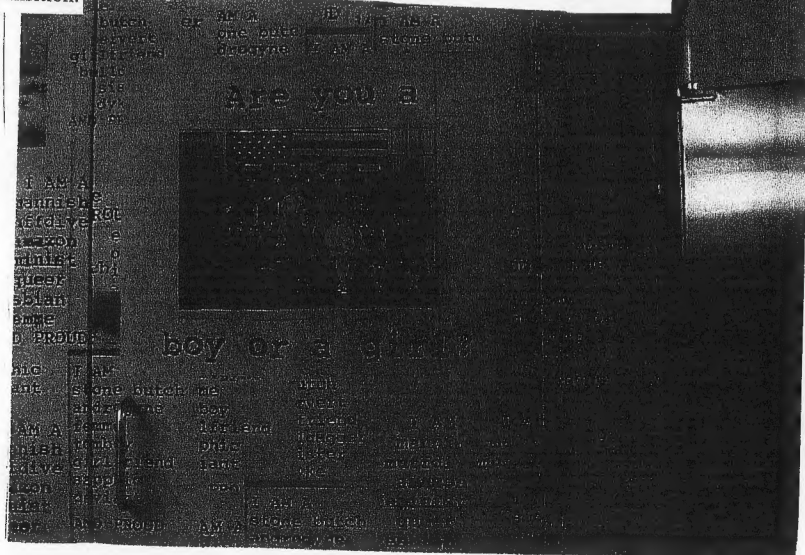
10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\*people?

Well the obvious thing would be for the feminist community to make a priority of educating themselves and recognizing cisgendered privilege. Aside from that things that feminist people can do are:

\* Talk to friends/family/community about trans struggles so that gender non-conforming people don't have to do all the work

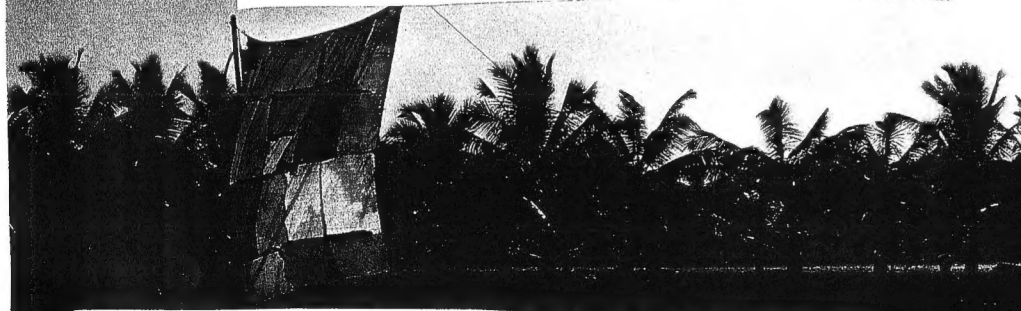
\* Understand the violence and threat that trans people, esp. trans women, experience internationally and work to make spaces safer for us. Starting with women's organizations. Any women's space that welcomes trans men but not trans women is not coming close to understanding or being respectful

\* Work on getting rid of expectations of what someone who is trans should be like - i.e. not questioning the gender validity of a trans woman who has not or does not intend to seek medical transition.



## What do you think of wom\*ns only spaces?

Spaces that are just for womyn are not only places womyn can feel more safe, trusting and understood. Womyn's spaces are like the day outside of time; they are a sanctuary outside of the spaces that our capitalist, patriarchal society creates. In a womyn's only space there is the potential to imagine (and create) a whole new way of interacting with each other, of working together, and creating community. Womyn have so much potential, we are capable of so much, but we seem to spend so much of our time focusing on and assisting the men in our lives. In womyn's spaces we can leave that outside and put that time and energy into each other and ourselves. The fruit of the combined time, energy, love, passion, wisdom, creativity and insight of a bunch of womyn working together has the potent ability to create a better world.



the aspects that i think contribute to women's spaces being good are: they centre women in a world in which men dominate space; they help build female solidarity and feminist community; they can feel safer than mixed spaces; they can create an environment in which women feel freer and more confident to speak their thoughts and feelings; they can create an environment in which women feel more confident to use their bodies.

I think that wom\*ns only spaces are important as are any space that create by and for a group of people who share a common identity. I think it becomes tricky when someone else decides who can identify the group and who can't. Eg. where a wom\*ns space dictates who is wom\*n then i have a problem with this. but where a space is for womyn only and then people self select into this space, i think it is important and i really enjoy these spaces.

the aspects that i think contribute to women's spaces being bad are: they can exclude gender-queer people whose presence is important in any feminist community; they can exclude pro-feminist men; they can essentialise what it means to be a woman by assuming a relationship between being female and having a feminist politics; they perpetuate the division of people into two gender categories.

as there is nothing inherently good or bad about women's only spaces, i think it's important for women-identifying feminists to not create them simply on principle but rather to create them when they will serve an important and specific purpose.



1. Who are you?  
Sally Goldner

2. How would you describe your gender?  
woman who has experienced transgender  
issues; trans woman fine to save space!

3. What's your pronoun?  
she/her

4. Which community do you identify with?

trans/bi/poly/queer

5. Are you a feminist?  
no

6. Why/not?

I'm a humanist

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist  
(WLF) movement?

Unfortunately, most direct encounters with the more extreme  
types e.g. Lesfest. But totally acknowledge they are not a representative  
sample!!!!

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

isn't one. Be  
good to build one...

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

as per 8

10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist  
better support trans\*people.

One word: listen.

I think once people listen  
there's a very quick realisation that the same sort of "femmophobia" (my  
word- prejudice against anyone or anything female and/or feminine) and

excessive use/misuse of masculinity that links  
transphobia/biphobia/racism/homophobia. we can then put our energy more  
effectively in the one direction

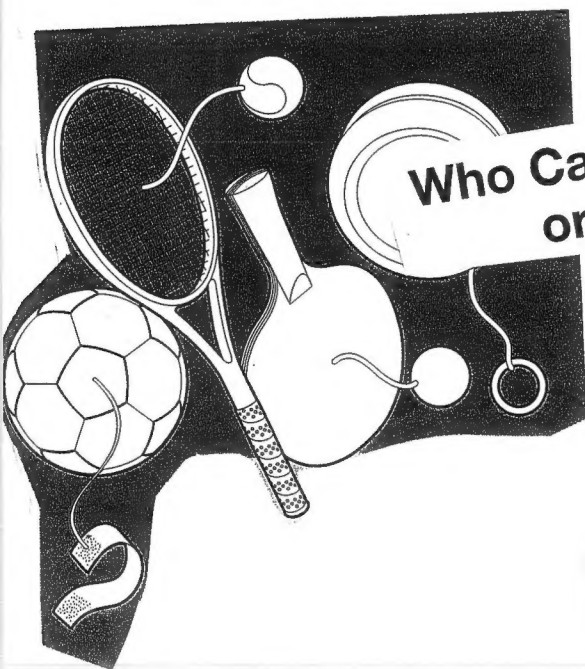
# NONE OF US ARE FREE UNTIL WE ARE ALL FREE

PEOPLE DON'T EXPERIENCE VIOLENCE IN A VACUUM. IN REMEMBERING THE LIVES AND MOURNING THE LOSS OF TRANS PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE WE HAVE TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SEXISM, RAPE CULTURE, THE HATRED

OF WOMEN'S BODIES, QUEERPHOBIA, KINKPHOBIA, HOMOPHOBIA,

SEXWORKER/WHORE-PHOBIA, CLASS STRUCTURE AND CAPITALISM, RACIAL OPPRESSION, COLONIALISM AND WHITE SUPREMACY, AND MILITANT HETERO-NORMATIVITY CANNOT AND MUST NOT BE SEPERATED OUT INTO NEAT LITTLE ISMS THAT ALL HAVE THEIR OWN ALLOCATED DAY THAT WE FEEL SHIT ABOUT THEM ON, EACH WITH A DIFFERENT COLORED RIBBON.

STRUCTURAL AND SYSTEMIC OPPRESSIONS ARE IN SOME WAYS ALL BUT ONE BEAST AND THOUGH WE ALL EXPERIENCE UNIQUE INTERSECTING LEVELS AND LAYERS OF PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION- THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DEAL WITH OUR SOCIALISED, INTERNALISED SHIT (ISMS) AND TO SHOW UP FOR EACHOTHER AND CALL OUT AND RESIST THIS SHIT IS FOR US ALL TO SHARE AND CARRY AND ENACT.



Who Cares What You Think  
or Who You Are?



1. Who are you?

Divo Sock

3. What's your pronoun?

She or he

2. How would you describe your gender?

genderqueer (encompassing among other things butchdyke, queer boi, FTM, fem drag, drag king, male, female) mutable in a woman's body using clothing, hair, makeup, pronouns, prosthetics and posturing (so far not hormones and surgery) to define the changes in my gender - not because I disagree with the use of hormones/surgery etc it's just that as my gender identity is fluid and those things are too permanent a change to help my appearance match my identity.

4. Which community do you identify with?

Communities: queer dyke, genderqueer, FTM to a certain extent

6. Why/not?

Because I believe in trying to achieve equal rights for all and I don't think women have them.

5. Are you a feminist?  
Absolutely!

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?

Generally good but sometimes they can be sexnegative/sexwork negative/trans negative. Specifically in terms of FTM/male genderqueer issues there is sometimes the assumption that just because you are enjoying/erotizing your or other peoples masculinity it automatically means you are less feminist or political or radical - which I certainly don't think is true.

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

It is one where I feel I have to be a bit careful what I say and do so I can't fully express my gender/sex positiveness around it without risking discrimination.

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

Things are changing - so with time perhaps.....

10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\*people

It would be great if non trans people didn't make assumptions about trans people based on their gender. Take time to find out what a person's politix etc are before deciding it for them. Remember that being trans usually isn't about gender politix it is about gender identity. Also, give trans people respect for the understanding of gender they have gained from living more than one gender and for the incredible (and often very difficult) journeys they have been on.

**Ample Examples.** So, into the examples of what I've been noticing and talking about with friends in terms of how misogyny plays out in the actions of many trans-boys and trans-masculine peoples. Much of this also applies to non-trans-boys/ men (cisgendered men) as well.

How white trans-boys are often celebrated and fetishized within radical (majority white) queer subcultures, whereas trans-women are often isolated and excluded. I've been wondering lately whether this is mostly misogyny or trans-phobia? Probably a combination of both. Misogyny because: anybody femme and/or woman identifying is seen as lesser, anybody masculine and/or man/boy identifying is celebrated. Trans-phobia because maybe some queer feminist communities don't count trans-women as "real women" and therefore exclude them because they are still the "enemy" (ie, "men"). Similarly this attitude doesn't count trans-boys/men as "real men" and therefore accepts them as still part of the women's community, whilst ironically elevating their status due to internalised misogyny.

- How so many trans-boys I know get away with being sexually and emotionally irresponsible and unaccountable in similar ways to non-trans-boys. I have directly noticed this in my own attitudes in certain situations, with a tendency to write-off the behaviour of trans-boys (e.g. "I didn't expect any better of him"), whereas being hurt in the same situation by the behaviour of femme folks (e.g. "She should have known better").
- If one more person says to me that trans-women take up too much space because they were socialised male, I think I may vomit all over them. But I'll be a little more diplomatic and suggest a game of Pin The Tale on the Stereotype instead. 1. If you're going to call out how gender socialises someone, then it's a good idea to also unpack race, class, body size, dis/ability, abuse history etc. And don't get me wrong – I don't want to shut down conversation about gender – I just think we need to discuss all of these identities rather than picking out one identity in isolation and creating unuseful stereotypes. 2. I believe both misogyny and trans-phobia are more often the root of this sort of comment. Stereotypes are often created to justify unjust behaviour and attitudes and cover over fear – like if someone is threatened by trans-women because they are trans-phobic or have internalised misogyny, it is much easier to come up with excuses like "they take up too much space" than acknowledge those fears or -isms. In the event that she is taking up a lot of space at your meeting, chances are it's because you won't open your group to her, or are subtly ostracising her or because she can tell that you don't consider her a "real" woman, or because she's uncomfortable with how you're glaring at her pants to assess what bits she has.
- How I still see mostly women and femmes doing the dishes (I mean, really? This is so basic I'm almost embarrassed to point it out!). Even if I have been messy around the house for my entire life (including when I identified as/was socialised as female), increasingly claiming a masculine and/or boy identity brings certain privileges (like fitting into deeply infused socialisations around gender roles like "boys don't clean") and therefore brings an increased responsibility to address those privileges. Any roles that perpetuate privileges, power dynamics and stereotypes need to be carefully negotiated with all who are directly or indirectly participating (e.g. this doesn't mean if you're a transboy you absolutely have to do the dishes – but if you want to contribute in other ways instead, then negotiate it!). I also want to point out that some femmes may love doing the dishes and shouldn't be judged as unradical for wanting to perform "traditionally feminine" roles. In fact, often those roles typically associated with women are seen as lesser or degrading work, effortless, natural or invisible – this needs to change.

**Being a femme-ally:** a conversation starter about some stuff trans-boys and trans-masculine peoples (and butch women) can do to challenge misogyny, be feminist and be femme-allies (and also allies to women in general, regardless of whether or not they are femme). Some of these things are interpersonal allyship, and others about organizing and doing solidarity work.

How most of the care/ support roles in the communities I live in are mostly done by women and femmes. I think trans-boys who request and utilise the support of femmes and women have a particular responsibility to be intentional with that support and ensure that dynamic is not only named, but negotiated as well. Once again, the problem is not when femmes *choose* to do care work – the problem is the assumption/ abuse of this relationship and the lack of trans-masculine folks valuing and/or prepared to do this work.

How trans-boys get to fix things. I've noticed a sharing of power and skills from non-trans men to trans-men that often doesn't happen between those two groups and women/ femmes. I challenge all trans-boys to not forget how hard it may have been to carve out a space in the woodwork lab at school, or under the bonnet of a car with the dudes or building something for the local activist fundraiser. But at the same time – don't over-insist that femmes should know how to fix things – some may not want to (just like some trans-masculine folks don't want to – frankly I'd prefer someone else to fix my bicycle!).

- Learn about feminist and femme and women's (trans and non-trans) struggles and histories. ESPECIALLY women of color feminist writers. Set up a reading/ discussion group. Read the words of femme/women activists. There are so many amazing femmes and women who have been doing a lot of work for so many years now – pay attention and learn! It is not the responsibility of femmes and women to educate other folks.

Receive criticism with full attention and without defensiveness. Even if you initially feel like the criticism is not true – resist the urge to write it off or be defensive.

- Develop your misogyny radar (both for your own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others) and be prepared to give constructive feedback to people in loving, supportive ways. In my experience, this often works best when done within friendships, or from people who have similar identities/ privileges (plus, it shouldn't be the responsibility of femmes/ women to call this sort of behaviour out!).

Don't fetishize femininity or femmes in nonconsensual ways.

Do anti-racist work. Racism is so inextricably part of femme-of color oppression in (mostly white) queer communities (not to mention in the mainstream), that addressing racism in queer communities is completely essential and central to femme-of-color solidarity.

Directly support femmes and women in your life. Listen to their experiences and try to understand how their oppression and marginalization is different from your own. Then if you think it is appropriate, ask them if/ how you could support them (but remember it is not their responsibility to educate you).

Do the fucking dishes! (and clean the toilet/mop the floor/cook/caretake etc). Or explicitly negotiate other roles that are mutually agreed upon by all involved. (Note: negotiation means C-O-M-M-U-N-I-C-A-T-I-O-N-G about something and making sure everyone has equal power to say what they really want/need, and that a solution is agreed upon). This is so obvious I almost didn't want to write it (because I think some trans-boys also think that's all there is to being a femme ally).

Centre the people most affected by oppressions – femmes, women (trans-women and non-trans-women), Indigenous people, people of color, queers, people with disabilities, fat folks, refugees, working class peoples etc. "Centre-ing" means those people are key decision makers and have a crucial role in shaping the movements. Don't assume you know what is best for people other than yourself.

Proactively build alliances that both explore and support the similarities in struggles between the trans and femme/ women's movements

Transfeminism developed out of a critique of the mainstream and radical feminist movements. The feminist movement has a history of internal hierarchies. There are many examples of women of color, working class women, lesbians and others speaking out against the tendency of the white, affluent- dominated women's movement to silence them and overlook their needs. Instead of honoring these marginalized voices, the mainstream feminist movement has prioritized struggling for rights primarily in the interests of white affluent women. While the feminist movement as a whole has not resolved these hierarchal tendencies, various groups have continued to speak up regarding their own marginalization – in particular, transgendered women. The process of developing a broader understanding of systems of oppression and how they interact has advanced feminism and is key to building on the theory of anarchist feminism.

[http://shiftshapers.gnn.tv/blogs/32505/Strengthening Anarchism's Gender Analysis Lessons from the Transfeminist Movement](http://shiftshapers.gnn.tv/blogs/32505/Strengthening%20Anarchism's%20Gender%20Analysis%20Lessons%20from%20the%20Transfeminist%20Movement)

Recommended sites for more information are [www.isna.org](http://www.isna.org) and [www.eminism.org](http://www.eminism.org).

And read "Whipping Girl" and "femmes of power"

1. The Transfeminist Manifesto by Emi Koyama (2000)

2. Lessons from the Free Women of Spain an interview with Martha Ackelsberg by Geert Dhont (2004)

<http://akpress.org/2004/items/freewomenofspain>

MORE:

Colours of Resistance [cor@mutualaid.org](mailto:cor@mutualaid.org)

<http://colours.mahost.org/article.html>

<http://questioningtransphobia.wordpress.com>

<http://questioningtransphobia.wordpress.com/category/feminism>

<http://bornwhore.wordpress.com>

[www.criticalresistance.org](http://www.criticalresistance.org)

[www.incite-national.org](http://www.incite-national.org)



Instead of facing this problematic and complicated situation the leaders of the gay community choose to exclude the Palestinian gays and supporters and to push them back to the closet, it's easiest and it goes hand by hand with the legend they create and promote.

<http://nisreenmazzawi.blogspot.com/2009/08/palestinian-gays-under-hijab.html>

Sweatshop Warriors by Miriam Ching Louie about immigrant women fighting for social change.

Barbara Smith's The Truth that Never Hurts is a collection of her essays that articulate a Black feminist politics of race, class, gender and sexuality.

From The Road: Snapshots of Living Resistance, a zine for liberation by Sonja S. and Jennica B.

A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism by Becky Thompson, chapter 7 of Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands/La Frontera and the writings of Helen Luu, Pauline Hwang, Laura Close, Chris Dixon and Laura McNeill



**An Open Letter to London Feminist Network:**

On 21<sup>st</sup> Nov 09 Feminist Fightback went as part of a Red Umbrella contingent on the Reclaim the Night March in London. We joined RtN because we are committed to fighting violence against women, and we marched alongside X:talk and the International Union of Sex Workers in solidarity with sex workers organising to fight exploitation in their industry. Nothing in the publicity for the march bans those with our views, nor do we feel our politics to in any way contradict the spirit of an anti-violence march.

Unfortunately, we faced physical harassment and verbal abuse from some people on the march, and were told on a number of occasions that we were not welcome on it. Worse than this, however, was the fact that we were immediately approached and interrogated by the police on arrival – reportedly at the request of one of the stewards. We understand our support for the rights of sex workers to self-organise is at odds with the views of some other groupings in the women's movement. Yet we were extremely surprised to find that one of the basic principles of feminism (and all social justice movements) was forgotten in this instance – namely, that we never resort to using police aggression to silence and intimidate members of our own movement, no matter how much we may disagree with them.

We strongly hope that this does not set a precedent for the further disintegration of feminism in London. We are therefore asking London Feminist Network to guarantee that in future the police will not be used against other feminists to close down political debate, and that Reclaim the Night will be a space in which diverse opinions can be expressed. At a time when we face the prospect of a Tory government, threatening to roll out all sorts of further attacks that will have disproportionate effects on women, through public spending cuts and the repressive rhetoric of 'family values', it is even more important that we build a movement that can work together on all the issues upon which we agree, and allow room for difference and debate upon those we do not. We should not be afraid that differences of opinion will block unity in action. In fact it is only by allowing space for diversity of opinion and embracing discussion that our movement will grow.

In Struggle,

## Feminist Fightback

Because we're  
all different

**PARKVILLE**

PARKVILLE  
3050

# PRINCE

**CARLTON**  
**NORTH**

**FITZROY**  
**NORTH**

## Dysphoria and Reasons Not to Transition

Note: Please don't assume things about other transpeople because of what I have written here. We are totally unique, and have different ways of experiencing all of this stuff. Likewise, don't assume anything much about me from this. I wrote this months ago, in a state of flux. Whilst editing this, I can now see plenty of holes in arguments set forth below, but decided not to edit them out, just thought I'd put it out there as a random example of a trans headspace.

So over the last month or so, one massive change has been a crazy amount of dysphoria. It has happened gradually, but it feels like over the last month it has gotten big enough for me to talk about or think specifically about. Gender dysphoria is the distress you feel about being in the wrong body. Some people experience it since the time they are very very small.

Before I knew transitioning was possible I don't think I was ever particularly dysphoric. I used to throw tantrums about having to wear a dress as a kid, but I think because I never connected that to 'I should be a boy', I never felt upset that I wasn't a boy. When I got a bit older I occasionally bound my breasts and always cross dressed, just preferring the way I looked, but I don't think I ever felt upset with the body that I had. There were pangs of wishing I had a man's body, though it usually happened at times when I had to actively compare myself to men, like when I dressed a man up in my clothes or when I wanted to take my shirt off, but couldn't.

After I found out transitioning was possible early this year, I realised I definitely would prefer to have a man's body. But it was really just a preference. I didn't feel overly upset that I didn't have that body yet. For the first six months or so I really just tried not to think about it too much. And then when I did get more action oriented about researching and doing things, I started feeling like there were things I could do that would help me feel more comfortable. Growing my hair a bit and binding was awesome. I felt heaps better in my own skin (or under a binder plus clothes). Its only really been since I acquired back problems a month ago and had to stop binding that I have started feeling dysphoric.

Previously I was tying the increase in dysphoria to the awareness of being in the wrong body. But now that I've written that and thought about it, it sounds more like its associated with going backwards from an experience of passing more or whatever. I love writing, it helps me figure out so much stuff.

What I was going to say is that if this dysphoria is tied to my awareness of 'being in the wrong body,' then I ought to be able to move back away from it by trying to accept the body I have. One could argue that the body a person is born in just naturally is the right body because its yours. So theoretically if I could ever somehow move back towards feeling like I'm just me and this just is my gender, its not male or female, then I wouldn't feel the need to modify my body. And that could be cool.

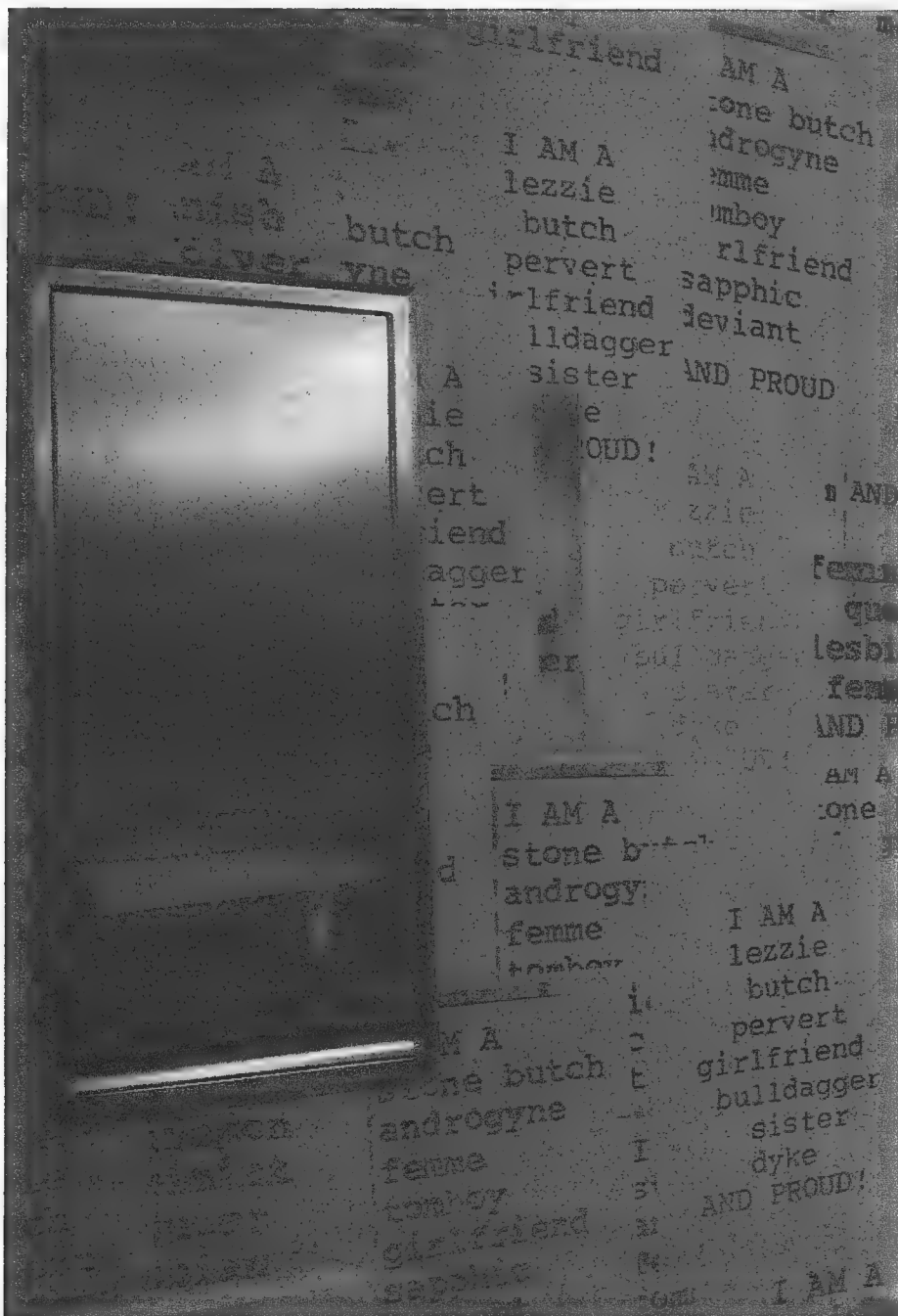
Is this reading as internalised transphobia arguing against the desire to transition? I can't tell.

Regardless, if the dysphoria is happening now more because I'm moving away from masculinising changes, then in a way that makes a lot of sense. And as for solutions to not transitioning that this theory provides, I shouldn't change anything about myself to become more male, and that way I eventually won't feel any dysphoria about my body. Its basically the solution where I just try to forget about it. In fact all my psychological musings are presenting that solution. It indicates that to some extent this whole idea of transitioning is just in my head. There is definitely a point though, from which I couldn't go any further back towards female or androgynous, regardless of all the crap in my head. The fact that I was fine in my body up until the time I thought about it though, just doesn't make heaps of sense.

I realised I haven't explained what sort of dysphoria stuff I've been feeling/thinking/doing... I keep looking at myself in mirrors, which feels ridiculous because I've never been interested in mirrors before. And I'm looking to check how visible my breasts are currently and how much I look like a man today (and to make sure my hair stays down). And when I see that my breasts are quite visible or whatever it is, I feel embarrassed and angry and uncomfortable, like I don't want to be out right now. Like people are going to think I'm a woman and that just feels so wrong. I've been spending a lot of time choosing clothes before I go out to try to minimise my breasts and my hips. Its so much easier in colder weather with my big suit jackets.

But then the feeling now of being in the wrong body, and feeling male and wanting to be perceived as male feels so real. And it could just make sense that I never realised it before because I didn't know about it. It didn't ever present as an option so I couldn't want it. Or else maybe my gender is just fluidly being a helluva lot more male now than it used to be. I have tried to forget about it a couple of times in past months. I haven't gotten past a few days lame attempts though. I don't know what is my psyche just reacting to things, and what is me just knowing that transitioning is what I want.

The whole process of getting used to not binding has been so interesting and so annoying. Especially coming in to summer, when I usually live in a singlet. I was worried about the viability of binding just in a singlet, but not binding at all is so much worse. The other night I went out with my partner, just wearing a singlet most of the night because of the intense heat. It felt so weird and wrong and upsetting. I wondered if maybe people on the tram could somehow still tell that I am a man on the inside. Whether they can tell something from the way that I relate to others or something. But no, they can't, they wouldn't think of it. And I wonder if they did somehow see me fully, would I feel more ok with just staying in a woman's body? I wish I knew how I to be a man in a woman's body and not feel trapped.



## What do you think of wom\*ns only spaces?

I think that autonomous wom\*ns spaces are extremely important and as long as there is a patriarchy there needs to be wom\*ns spaces. I don't like how gender police feminists try and judge who does and does not qualify as a woman (see forwarded email re RTN London). I believe anyone who has had a lived experience as a woman, be that pre or post transition, used to identify or now identifies, should be welcome in a womens space. Anyone who can bring a perspective and understanding of sexism and patriarchy (cos hey no matter how queer we try and make the world those 2 very unpleasant things still exist!).

But at the end of the day it is up to an individual to decide what their gender identity is. And until we live in a genderless world (can't wait!) then wom\*ns spaces are still important.

what i think? i think:

I am wary of them because of their history of transphobia. I'm in support ONLY when we are explicit that "women" includes--and actually centres--women who are transgendered. If not, then as an ally to trans folks, I'm completely opposed to them. A transphobic definition of women is violent and mean and I can't support what that does to my beloved friends and community. Women's only space could be a great way to share community, build our strength and analyses, support and love on other lady-identified people. I could just never do this in a way that rests on violent divisions between us, including transphobia, white supremacy, classism, colonialism, ableism or any other system of oppression. All of us or none! This means more than inclusion, it means that as a community, an organization and as individuals we engage in on-going processes of revolutionizing what separates us and keeps some people at the centre. Maybe this could mean building relationships across difference, caucusing, study groups, consciousness-raising, reading, volunteering your time for organizations led by women with less privilege, making mistakes and learning from them, whatever. It means making our love for all women an active choice--and creating a women's only space out of that love.

Womens spaces also serve as a safe space. Some women appreciate being able to go to a space that is free of bio-men. This is still really important!

On that note I don't think womens spaces should just be turned into "queer" spaces as a symbol of eliminating all genders (one argument I've heard). Strict Gender roles and inequality and oppression against women still exists so this is a pointless exercise. Autonomous spaces exist to fight what happens outside of that space and systems of oppression. Queerifying womens spaces, ie any gender being welcome, mean ppl who have never identified as a woman, and therefore do not understand issues around patriarchal oppression, would be a part of organising around womens issues or whatever else ppl choose to do in these spaces. Or feminist issues will just get pushed aside and replaced with a queer agenda. So campaigns around abortion, sexual and domestic violence, body image, wages, education, womens unique experience of war, as refugees, as sex workers, etc would not be focused on.



1. Who are you?

My name is Sunny. I am a human critter. I am white and come from English and Irish ancestors, and I was born and grown in Australia. I grew up with middle-class resources and a mongrelized hybrid of working class and middle-class ethics (due to different statuses of my divorced parents). I consider myself middle-class now even though I earn hardly any money, because I could if I wanted to, and I am well-versed in that culture. I am small-ish in body size, and despite having facial hair and not being very femme, I pass as "attractive enough" in mainstream contexts. I grew up with encouraging parents in a non-abusive environment. I am Queer. I am Genderqueer/ trans. I have occupied the spaces of performance artist, community activist, planning/project/organisational consultant, friend, lover, kid, caretaker, and random dancer at traffic lights and train stations.

2. How would you describe your gender?

I am trans-gendered/ genderqueer. My gender is "carnavalesque magician". Which is one part boy, one part pixie winged critter and one part something else entirely.

3. What's your pronoun?

He. Or sometimes "they" in circles where I don't want to come out.

4. Which community do you identify with?

Creative/ performance/ radical queer

5. Are you a feminist?

Hell yes!

6. Why/not?

Because I love people and we live in a patriarchy and I want to create something different.

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?

I have had many positive, growing and enriching experiences in the WLF. I have learnt a lot. However, I have also found a lot of the WLF I was moving in to be transphobic – the type of transphobia that is not always overt and out there, but rather subtle in the way of invisibilising trans folk. It is increasingly difficult for me when someone simply makes the assumption and tries to bond with me over being "women".

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

I am strongly identified with feminist folks (of all genders), women, genderqueers and trans peoples.

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

See answer to question 10!

10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\*people,

\* Don't make assumptions about people's genders – even when you think it is obvious (for example, not all people who look "femme" are women – I know plenty of amazing femme trans





fags, trans boys and genderqueers). Get up the courage and ask! For example, "hi, my name is Sunny, I use the pronoun "he" instead of "she" – how about you?" I realise this can be more challenging when interacting in communities that have less exposure to trans/ genderqueer politics and struggles. Sometimes you may need to be prepared to explain what you mean.

- \* Learn about trans and genderqueer struggles. Set up a reading/ discussion group. Read the words of trans activists. There are so many amazing trans folks who have been doing a lot of work for so many years now – pay attention and learn! It is not the responsibility of trans folks to educate non-trans folks, however, many trans people will be happy to be on an informal or formal advisory group – to provide suggestions, be a guest speaker and make sure that the group doesn't sail off into irrelevance. Consider first volunteering and supporting trans organizations before asking them to support your learning group.

- \* Bring attention to behaviour that is acceptable/ unacceptable. I hear a lot of criticisms that "trans-women take up too much space because they were socialised male". Frankly, I know a lot of people who were socialised female who take up too much space. There are many factors of socialisation that affect someone's behaviour (like race, class etc) – not just gender, so unless you are embarking on a full process to unpack all those layers and challenge these with each other, I think it is more useful to call out the behaviour. And if you are from a background who was socialised to feel a sense of entitlement and take up space (like if you are rich/middle class, raised in a non-abusive environment, white, skinny, able-bodied, male socialised etc) – take responsibility and adopt the mantra WAIT ("why am I talking?") before you take up space.

- \* Drop stereotypes. Make friends with trans folks and people who come from different identities to yourself. Before I left Brisbane, I knew a very small handful of trans people. It was much easier for me to make stereotypes based on the few trans people I knew. I've been living in San Francisco for nearly one and a half years, and now I have a huge trans and genderqueer community, and those stereotypes now seem ridiculous to me!

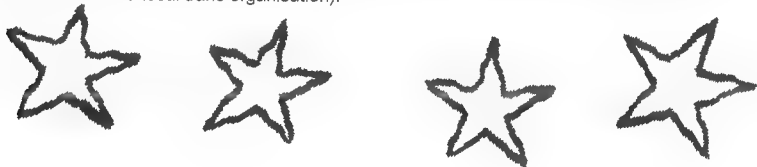
- \* Proactively build alliances that BOTH explore and support the similarities in struggles between the non-trans women movements and trans/ genderqueer movements AND acknowledge the differences and seek to figure out what being a good ally means (this applies to both non-trans and trans folks).

- \* Challenge misogyny in all ways. For example, why do many queer communities embrace (and even fetishize) trans-boys, whereas exclude and ostracise trans-women? It is called M-I-S-O-G-N-Y! Be on alert for it – even if you are a veteran kick-arse feminist, it's surprising the subtle and not so subtle ways it shows up.

- \* Seek to understand how all the different systems of oppression are linked - find the intersections with other struggles – don't just think about gender – think about class, race, age, sexuality, body size, ability etc. There are some good resources out there – find them! (or ask me [sunnydragonflight@yahoo.com](mailto:sunnydragonflight@yahoo.com) ). Then spend a certain proportion of your time making linkages between different struggles and supporting other causes.

- \* Centre the people most affected by oppressions – Indigenous people, people of non-European backgrounds, women, trans folks, queers, people with disabilities, fat folks, refugees, working class peoples etc. "Centre-ing" means those people are key decision makers and have a crucial role in shaping the movements. Don't assume you know what is best for people other than yourself.

- \* Work with people within your own layers of privilege (e.g. if you are a white female assigned woman, work with other white women to challenge homophobia, transphobia, racism etc) AND support the movements of people with less privilege (e.g. volunteer to do the boring office work 3 hours a week with a local trans organisation).



1. Who are you?

american, white, activist, uni student, female, feminist, autonomist/anarchist, stoner, aspiring drummer

2. How would you describe your gender? female

3. What's your pronoun?

she

5. Are you a feminist?

yes

4. Which community do you identify with?

queer (sometimes)  
feminist (sometimes)  
anarchist (sometimes)

6. Why/not?

feminism explains the world i live in and my experiences in it and it offers me ways of changing the world (for the better) and taking control of those experiences i think patriarchy is real, and bad, and want to get rid of it

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?

mixed. i've worked with amazing feminists doing what felt like useful work: taking to the streets, going to high schools, working autonomously and in a grassroots way, challenging sexism within the left more broadly...

i've also been upset by the white-centrism of a lot of feminists: a blindness to the lack of

ethnic/racial diversity within their organising, a lack of commitment to fighting racial oppression, a use of language that only makes sense to white people, an unwillingness to take on board the implications of white privilege...

i've been frustrated by the reification of gender norms perpetuated by feminists, often through a woman-centred identity politics that is understandable but limited and, in the long run, ineffective i think. in this i'm more inclined to identify my politics as queer: i want to disrupt gender. that said, i am not keen on a queer identity politics. i think queer should act to disrupt any sort of sexual/gendered identity.

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

i work with lots of women, not so much in the wlf movement/community, but doing feminist work. a lot of this work however, isn't explicitly feminist. my feminism is everywhere all the time, i bring it to all the work i do.

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

if i saw a wlf movement that was more cohesive, explicitly anti-racist and anti-capitalist, explicitly queer as well in its stance on gender, i think i would be more inclined to centre my political work there. as it is, i prefer to work on building a movement that is anti-capitalist, anti-state, horizontal, etc, that is also feminist.

10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\*people,

(possibly linking the struggles?)

i think there are individual ways that non-trans people can support trans people: teachin themselves about the issues, being considerate in their language, not being judgemental. i don't think feminists can support trans people when they're caught in an identity politic that necessarily essentialises men and women. patriarchy organises power in a way that privileges men over women, yes, but it also organises power in a way that privileges gender-normative over non-gender-normative people. this needs to part of the feminist agenda.

This could also be "how I learned to talk about high femme without indulging in femme competition and honoring femme solidarity in my life". Also, it should be said that I really love the ways sublimefemme talks about high femme. I really love how the other fierce femmes in my life talk about how intentional it is for them, how we can talk about femme as this thing we do. I wrote a bit about femme invisibility in May of last year, but have kind of rethought my gender a little since then (still identifying as femme, but am not really using "boi" any more as it didn't even make sense in my own head (and I kind of realized that as much as I may take and detourne' cues from gay male culture, they don't end up readable in a male-ish way (nor do I really intend them to)). I've recently grown quite fond of "queen", as it matches the artificialness, performance, and planning that goes into how I do gender.

And it kind of dawned on me, that while high femme often gets held up as competitive, as "more femme", as requiring class privilege I don't have, certain body types I don't fit, that's not it at all - like sublimefemme says, high femme is the conscious performance of a stylized femininity. It's just that our stereotypes of it involve looking like a movie starlet. It was until I accepted that my conscious performance was okay, that I could stop seeing it as a competition, that I must be failing because I'm trying (and I think with how involved femininity gets, most people who are feminine have to try at some of it, at the least), that if I said I was high femme, or even being high femme at a point I wouldn't be saying to all the other femmes in my life that I was competing with them.

Rather than say, a traveling punk living out of a backpack who yet still manages to have a full complement of makeup and perfectly coordinated outfits, where wrinkles and being threadbare only adds to the aesthetic.

It's getting over the inferiority complex of "why do I over think every outfit, why am I so intentional when I get ready, why isn't femme something I just roll out of bed and do the way I want to do it", and realizing that the massive intentionality is that high femme is definitely a "doing being" gender. One where you're consciously embodying and performing a queer femininity for whatever ends you're up to. It doesn't have to do with being "good" or "bad" at being femme, or being "more" femme than anyone else, or having a certain femme style.

To me, it's being ridiculously femme in all the best ways - learning to indulge guilt-free in style and personal appearance, and not hiding it, even if the way I indulge that is through freeboxes, the goodwill bins, hand-me-downs, and altering clothing. And femme and high femme are a lot of things for me, but, for me, it's definitely an insurrection against "woman" because by being so performative, so constructed, so artificial in my femmeness, I feel like it visibly steps me aside (at least to genderqueer eyes) from the supposedly "natural" gender of woman, while showing that woman isn't any more natural than any other gender. <http://anarchiafemme.wordpress.com>

## What do you think of wom\*ns only spaces?

What do I think of women's only spaces - Is that in general? Because I think it is really important regardless of your sexuality. I think it is important for us to know that there are like minded beings in this world. That we are respected for who we are and it is okay to share our thoughts and ideas regardless of how out there they are. Especially on communities where traditional knowledge has been overtaken by white supremacy, because it was the women who have long held the key and the knowledge to different health ailments and food gathering and child survival, without these women only spaces to share then the knowledge doesn't get passed on. We become lost in translation again!

I'm not too sure what I think anymore about wom\*ns only spaces. I definitely think they important and necessary in certain contexts, I just think these contexts need to be kept talking about. As more and more ppl are challenging gender and gender politics, it becomes more relevant to keep having conversations about gender/feminism/trans and women's only politics fit in with each other. Personally I've had to do a lot of thinkig about how I fit in now as I used to participate within a radical feminist community, now identifying as a trans guy I realise it is inappropriate for me to attend marches such at Reclaim the Night (which I used to really love), although the world still percieves me as female and therefore susceptible to sexual violence. I think wom\*ns dv refuges still need to be wom\*n only spaces, perhaps trans communities need refuges as well? I'm actually not sure, which is why it becomes evident these discussions need to continue happening within different communities.

good things (though I often like mixed too).

i think women's only spaces are neither always good nor always bad as  
so i don't have a general feeling about women's spaces but rather  
specific feelings about specific women's spaces.

oftentimes like water splatting on the cracked dry earth longtime break the drought, the hardships...cooling, soothing, ..slowly trickling into the roots, wetting, feeding, gulping parchedquenching nourishingsometimes first abundance swelling, bubbling laughter safety expanding finding what you're looking for? family? flourishing? feasting resting birthing sexing? meeting in self to self on equal ground, hidden secrets, strengths, sufferings, beauty, stumbings, same same

empowering

alternative dimensions

see the obvious absence of oppressions some

blah blah blah

sometimes just doesnt appeal at all, just feels like a scene, some inverted boring headfuck,

therapy?

random hopes colliding with reality of human foibles...

i haven't been to any recently, but they're a connection point and a meeting place, a resource centre, and they feel safe and affirming

## MY ANSWERS

1. I am a passionate pansy
2. As a child I was described as a 'tom boy' but was strongly encouraged to act like a 'young lady'. I would describe my gender as pansy and casually flamboyant.
3. People call me all the pronouns but I prefer ambiguous ones. Most of the time I don't feel attached to a particular pronoun for myself, but rather feel it is more important to me for people to see me the way I see myself.
4. I identify with my queer community
- 5/6. I am a feminist because most of the world is dominated by patriarchal power.
7. I have enjoyed being part of the feminist movement but I have found it challenging to be a queer/gender queer person within it. I visually pass as a woman and feel comfortable with all the pronouns therefore I am acceptance in parts of the feminist movement. My friends who don't pass don't benefits from this acceptance. This situation is my dilemma. Currently I use this ability to pass to be vocal about my queer feminist politics. I'm not sure how I will feel about this in the future.
8. I'm part of the WLF movement/ community
9. My relationship with the WLF movement/ community could be better if there was more understanding and inclusion of queer, gender queers and trans people with in it.
10. In my opinion non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist can better support trans\*people by listening and learning from the experiences of trans/gender queer people. Reading, seeking out information and listening to trans/gender queer people's experiences especially in relation to feminism. This is what I do to better understand the people who have experience the world differently to me. Look for the many faeces of gendered based oppression such as experiencing the world as a women and expressing your gender in a way that isn't the gendered norm.

Mr McClelland's



Finishing School



## Social Construction and Essentialism

**NS:** *What is the significance of the challenge to the two-gender dichotomous (male/female) system that transgendered and transsexual people raise? How can radical activists who are not transsexual or transgendered take up this critique of gender relations in the daily work that they do?*

This question is one that comes up again and again on the left. I am happy to have the opportunity to answer it, in a sense to un-do this question, because it helps to illustrate some of the issues that I have raised in my previous answers. Let me begin by briefly summarizing some of the underlying assumptions of this question. The question follows a line advanced by some self-designated transgendered activists and repeated over and over again by queer theorists in the university. It argues that the binary sex/gender system, the exclusive division of the world into "men" and "women," is oppressive. And this argument further contends that this is oppressive not only to transsexuals, but indeed to men and women who consider themselves "properly" sexed and gendered. And having made this critique of the binary sex/gender system, this position then goes on to state that social change can happen through some kind of disruption or displacement of the sex/gender system. That's where transgendered people come in, located within this framework as those who successfully challenge the status quo and point out a new way of going forward.

Now, having given a brief overview of what I see as some of the underlying assumptions of the question, let me return to the division I made earlier between "transsexuals" and "transgendered." I said that more and more, a lot of transsexuals take a critical distance from the term "transgendered." And this question allows us an opportunity to think through why. The question assumes that "transgendered" people will see their bodies, identities, and lives as part of a broader process of social change, of disrupting the sex/gender binary. Now many transgendered people make such an argument: you can read it in the works of Leslie Feinberg, Riki Ann Wilchins, or Kate Bornstein. But many transsexuals do not see themselves in these terms. They would situate themselves as "men" and as "women," not as "gender radicals" or "gender revolutionaries" or "boyzzz" or "grrrrrris" or whatever cute phrase people on university campuses decide to use this week. Most transsexuals I know, and most I have interviewed, describe themselves as men or women. And there is a sense in which this position cannot be understood in relation to the question posed, "what is the significance of the challenge to the two-gendered dichotomous system that transsexual/transgendered people raise?" because transsexuals seek to have a different embodied position within that system. I hope it is clear here what I am trying to do -- I hope to show how asking the question in this way forces transsexuals to speak a language that is foreign to us. And while it may have meaning and relevance for transgendered people, it has very little to do with the everyday lives of transsexuals.

Now it is usually assumed, in the university and even in progressive movements for social change, that people who adopt "essentialist" positions (that gender for instance is innate and not socially made) are not politically progressive. But you know, I think that the interest in social constructionism in the Anglo-American university is in danger of blinding people to the very good political work that one can do from an essentialist position. And I will go out on a limb here - because to be a good thinker and activist and teacher means taking some risks - and I will say that in the case of transsexuals, essentialism has such a bad name!

Let me cite an example to help illustrate my case. It is so often assumed, that in disrupting a binary sex/gender system, transgendered people are in the forefront of social change. I cited the works of Leslie Feinberg and Riki Ann Wilchins earlier. Both of these writers are located within this framework: they advocate a "transgendered" revolution. Now, this is supposed to be a position that is so much more sophisticated than those terrible essentialist transsexuals. And the position advocated by Feinberg and Wilchins is the one cited by critics in queer theory. These are the authors who make it onto the course outlines of university studies. And





it is all done by well-intentioned, well-meaning teachers who would situate themselves as allies of transsexuals.

But let us examine in more depth some of the political work of Feinberg and Wilchins. Wilchins has been not only active, but instrumental, in lobbying for the de-listing of gender identity disorder from the manual of psychiatrists, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual IV. And Feinberg also supports such a position, notably in publishing the "International Bill of Gender Rights" in her book. This Bill also contends that gender identity disorder has no place in the psychiatric diagnostic manual. If such a lobby is successful, it will mean that it will be impossible to pay for sex reassignment surgery either through a private insurance company or through state/provincial health insurance. In this light, the activism of Wilchins and Feinberg supports the privatisation of health care. So here we have a case of some transgendered activists, influenced by social constructionist theory, who argue that they are the cutting edge of social change. Yet they are involved in political work which is deeply conservative. Now let us contrast this with the work of some transsexuals like Margaret O'Hartigan, who has been instrumental in ensuring that sex reassignment surgery is paid for through state health insurance in Minnesota, and who has offered a trenchant critique of the funding of health care services in Oregon, including services for transsexuals. Now, O'Hartigan is an essentialist: she is not making any claims to disrupting the sex/gender binary, she is not hailing herself as the new vanguard of third wave feminism. What she is doing, is the highly unglamorous work of research, lobbying, and activism to ensure that all transsexuals can have access to health care, regardless of their economic or financial resources. So here we have an example of an essentialist (gasp!) who is, in my opinion, doing some excellent political work.

So I hope it is clear, then, how the question posed to me contains all kinds of assumptions that I do not accept. And so one of the things I hope to do is to encourage people to be deeply critical of the kinds of information and knowledge available on transsexuals, perhaps especially the knowledge advocated by "transgendered" people. In practical terms, this means reading more than Leslie Feinberg, Riki Ann Wilchins, Kate Bornstein, or Judith Butler.

## Addressing the Politics of Social Erasure: Making the Lives of Transsexual People Visible

*An Interview With Viviane Namaste*

<http://www.newsocialist.org/magazine/39/article04.htm>



1. Who are you?

me :D

2. How would you describe your gender?

female

3. What's your pronoun?

Ms

4. Which community do you identify with?

Queer

5. Are you a feminist?

Yes, but I'm also probably more of a humanist

6. Why/not?

I believe in equality for people generally - e.g. anyone with a disability is possibly likely to be discriminated against / marginalised regardless of their gender

7. What have been your experiences with the wom\*n's liberation/feminist (WLF) movement?

I know this sounds odd, but when I was at Uni I felt a bit excluded from the feminist (women's room) people - I even had someone say - "you can't be a lesbian with long hair and a skirt". I felt more comfortable hanging out with the gay guys (and the odd other dyke) in the queer collective - they were more welcoming and less cliquy and more fun to be around... great parties!

8. What is your relationship with the WLF movement/ community?

Don't know, I but probably do more queer rights movement stuff than feminist stuff - e.g. more likely to go to Pride festival than reclaim the night (though in my opinion pride is a more fun event generally)

9. How do you see your relationship with the WLF could be different?

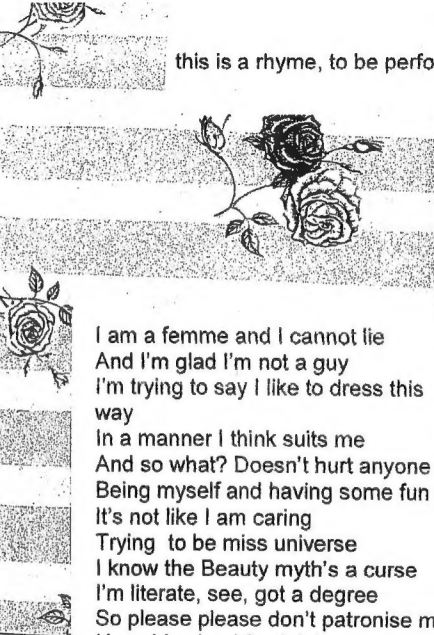
Not sure.... Maybe if the events were more fun focused I'd be more interested in participating, I get too much politics and human services stuff with my work that I'd rather do fun stuff in my spare time.

10. In your opinion, how can non-trans\* people who identify as pro/feminist better support trans\* people,

Hmm, that's hard to answer not being trans / gender queer myself and not strongly identifying as part of the feminist movement, however one of my ex partners is trans... I guess one way could be to ensure that trans people are more welcome at feminist events, the whole only inviting "women born women" to "women's only" events excludes heaps of m to fs for example - e.g. the Michigan women's festival, and the controversy about that women's only space thing thing down south a number of years ago. Maybe ensuring more inclusivity or something. I think there will be a lot of work on this needed as for so many years trans people (especially m to f) have been / felt not included and even discriminated against in this way - I doubt it can be fixed over night.



## Ladies are Back

this is a rhyme, to be performed to the tune of "Baby got back" by Sir Mix-a-lot  
created by lady betty

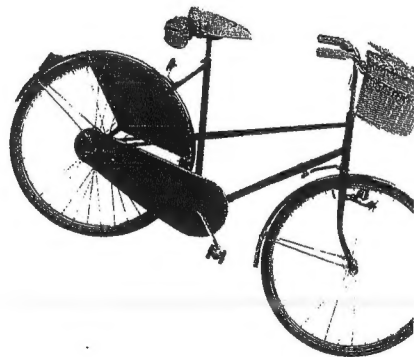



I am a femme and I cannot lie  
And I'm glad I'm not a guy  
I'm trying to say I like to dress this way  
In a manner I think suits me  
And so what? Doesn't hurt anyone  
Being myself and having some fun  
It's not like I am caring  
Trying to be miss universe  
I know the Beauty myth's a curse  
I'm literate, see, got a degree  
So please please don't patronise me  
Hey old school feminist  
You say you know best?  
Don't tell me what to be  
Based on your ideology  
Isn't that misogynistic? You  
Create a label and it sticks  
I'm tired of lesbian scenes  
Saying femmes aren't worth anything  
"Just existing to complement men"?  
You better think again  
So ladies! (yeah)  
Ladies (yeah)  
Do you like looking pretty? (Hell yeah)  
Well flaunt it! Get on it!  
Let's get to the nitty gritty  
Ladies are Back  
Ladies are back

It doesn't mean bad things  
If I like to dress frilly  
Earrings makeup and such, long hair  
Skirts dresses nice underwear  
It's not a scandal



Just get a handle  
Around difference. See  
Its no mystery  
I'm not anti-feminist  
I think women's lib is the best  
With real choices I have  
Check my credentials  
I'm no servant of patriarchals  
Playing down my essentials  
I'm getting down in this town  
Spreading my femme love around  
For my bois like Feinberg  
And other gender outlaws  
I salute you  
Respect your work too  
But I gotta be true when I say  
It's not my way  
That's why I got solidarity  
Coz struggles are won this way, see  
A lotta peeps won't like this song  
Maybe they got something going wrong  
I'm happy to stay and play  
and share what I got to say  
coz I've come and I've gone  
and I'm down to get a message on  
So ladies (yeah)  
Ladies (yeah)  
Do you get my meaning?  
Then flaunt it! Get on it!  
It's more than a feeling  
Ladies are Back  
Ladies are Back



E PAINS OF BEING PURE AT HEAT



Femme Means Attack" call for submissions:

"Femme Means Attack" is a collaborative zine of submissions by people who identify as femme and as radical, anarchist, and/or anti-authoritarian. Femmes are often seen as non-radical or counterrevolutionary in many radical communities, despite the fact that we can take to the streets just as well as anyone else, in heels or steel-toed boots, and are FIERCE while doing it. As radical femmes, we often find ourselves alienated from mainstream femme discourse that focuses on standards of femme/femininity which are white, homonormative, aspire to be bourgeoisie, and rely on conspicuous consumption. Thus, we radical femmes often find ourselves alienated from both our radical communities and femme communities.

"Femme Means Attack" aims to change that by giving us, radical femmes, a voice. We welcome submissions from femmes of all genders, trans and cis, binary gendered and genderqueer, of all races, socioeconomic backgrounds, both urban and rural, of all dis/ability statuses, etc. While submissions should touch on both femme identity and radical politics/communities, we leave it up to each contributor to determine what that looks like. We welcome all types of submissions – essays, personal accounts, poetry, artwork, etc.

Along with your submissions, we ask that you submit a one hundred word bio. This is merely to let us know who you are and where you are coming from on the femme spectrum. That said, there will be a bio section in the zine, so if you do wish to have your bio included, let us know.

Likewise, if you wish to tell us (the editors) your name, but would not like it published in the finished zine, just let us know. However, we do request that you use a pen name or nom de queer so that half of the zine is not attributed to "anonymous."

Criteria for submissions are:

Absolutely nothing oppressive.

You may submit as many pieces as you would like.

Submissions must be in an easily accessible computer format.

Additionally, written works must be submitted in a format that will allow for editing. That is- editing of format, not content.

PDF files will not be accepted.

Artwork must be submitted in jpeg format.

Please send submissions to:

femme means attack@gmail.com

Submissions are due by April 15, 2010

Your co-editors,

naydeehn pearl messier and gayge sparkly purple unicorn freyjasbarn

If any other issues arise with submissions, they will be handled on an individual basis.

You will receive notice as to whether or not your submission has been accepted. If you wish to challenge our rejection of your submission, we welcome your feedback. We only ask that you are as respectful to us as we will be to you. We both identify as anarchists and do not wish to hold any sort of power over anyone else. This zine's purpose, and our purpose in publishing it, is to bring unity and strength to femmes around the world.



REMEMBER

---

YOUR HEART

---

IS A WEAPON

---

THE SIZE OF

---

YOUR FIST.

---

KEEP FIGHTING

---

KEEP LOVING

---

**This zine was created on stolen land in occupied Aboriginal Australia, on the land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations (Melbounre)**

**©reate ©ulture. You are welcome to copy and distribute this zine.**

**To make comments/ critique or contribute to a future issue please email [genderqueerzine@gmail.com](mailto:genderqueerzine@gmail.com)**

57118  
\$4